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MEMORANDUM FOR THE ACTING DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: 29 December Meeting with Acting Secretary Packard

1. Two matters came up during the course of my 29 December session with Mr. David Packard, Acting Secretary of Defense, which you should be aware of. The first relates to the PRU program and the second, to US aerial interdiction of Communist supply activity in Laos.

2. The PRU's: The Acting Secretary and I discussed the current state of play on the PRU matter in light of last week's 303 Committee deliberations. Packard explained that the Committee had endorsed the program and supported the PRU concept but directed the Agency and the Department of Defense to work out between them the problem of US military participation in the PRU program and the rate at which such military personnel should be withdrawn. Packard said Secretary Laird had been somewhat unhappy with the ~~203~~ 303 decision since he (Laird) was very anxious to get the military out of the program as quickly as possible. Packard added that General Abrams shared Secretary Laird's concern and his desire to disengage with all possible speed.

3. I noted that it was my impression that Laird and Abrams had concerns that were clearly related but nonetheless somewhat different. It seemed to me that Secretary Laird was bothered about the general possibility of some state of political flap arising with the PRU program,

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a flap in which the US Army might be implicated by virtue of its continued involvement. Abrams, on the other hand, was specifically worried about his possible inability to impose military discipline -- i. e., court martial -- to any of his personnel assigned to the PRU program if a flap should develop. This appeared to be one of the principal lessons General Abrams had drawn from the Green Beret affair. The Acting Secretary agreed with this analysis.

4. I then went on to point out that whereas no one could guarantee that there would not be any flap or unfortunate incident arising from PRU activity, all possible steps had been taken to tighten control over the program and reduce political risks involved. I then dwelt on the importance of the program, its demonstrated record of performance, and stressed the fact that the program represented a great operation targetted against enemy morale and, hence, the very kind of operation we were under specific instructions from the President to increase. I also noted that Mr. Karamessines had already offered a compromise proposal which would reduce the number of military personnel assigned to the program to 60 by March 1970 and to 30 by the end of October 1970, these 30 continuing in an advisory capacity until June 1971. This seemed to me the most rapid withdrawal rate feasible under the circumstances, particularly since cutting down the advisory effort too quickly would increase the risk of the very kind of flap we were all anxious to avoid.

5. After some discussion revolving around the points outlined above, Mr. Packard said he could see the merit of the Agency's position and suggested that all further consideration of this matter be ~~xxx~~ suspended until Secretary Laird's return. He requested that I be prepared to go over the problem and the equities involved in detail with him and Secretary Laird at our next meeting on 5 January 1970.

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6. Laos Interdiction: We also discussed the issues [redacted]

[redacted] strikes on route 65 in Laos within the ten mile buffer zone along the North Vietnamese border, the zone within which US aerial activity is now prohibited [redacted]

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[redacted] I noted that our information supported [redacted]

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[redacted] assessment of the importance of route 65 to Communist re-supply activities though we questioned whether there had in fact been an increase in Communist use of this road in 1969 over 1968. Our position was that the road had played a very important role in both years. We also discussed the possible North Vietnamese reaction should the buffer zone be violated. I pointed out that the zone constituted a self-imposed restriction, ~~in~~ not anything negotiated with Hanoi. We also discussed the fact that if the Administration wished to give a quiet signal to North Vietnam that US patience was not infinite, a lifting of our own self-imposed restrictions in this sparsely populated area might be politically useful. Mr. Packard was very much in accord with these views and said he himself saw no reason why strikes against Vietnamese Communist re-supply activities

into Laos could not spill over beyond the North Vietnamese border. He himself saw no reason whatsoever for the imposition of any kind of a buffer in this particular area. At Mr. Packard's request, I left with ~~him~~ him ~~as well as~~ a sketch map of the area involved prepared by my associates. He said he planned to take this matter up immediately with the Joint Chiefs and the White House.

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Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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